

Seattle City Council

**Public Safety, Government Relations, and Arts Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, 2:00 PM, August 7, 2007

**Words' Worth**

The Poetry Program of the Seattle City Council

Curated by **Brian McGuigan**

Today's poet is **Katinka**

Katinka Kraft is a German-American spoken word poet and multi-media performance artist, having graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in Multi-Media Performance Art, Cultural Studies, and Youth Advocacy. She is Co-director of Oratrix Productions, author of a self-published collection of poetry titled "Who Will Write the History of Tears" and is featured on the 2003 "Oratrix" CD. She was a featured spoken word artist on the 2004 "All Girl All Word" and 2005 "Write Off" tours. She is Director of Facilities at Richard Hugo House, a Seattle based literary non-profit, and recently directed and filmed a feature length documentary titled 'the Descendants Project'.

**A Craving to Remember**

by Katinka Kraft

Er hatte angst fur seine Kinder.

My Grandfather was a soldier for Hitler's regime- he didn't believe in the word of the Fuhrer-he was a quiet man afraid for his children.

Deutschland war die grosse Macht.

My great granduncle built weapons for the Nazis with his sharp mind. He was a proud man building powerful tools for what he believed was a great nation. After the war, he was transferred to the United States, where he became a rich man building Nazi weapons for what was to be the next great nation.

Sie hatte angst.

My grandmother was a woman in denial. She shook her head at my father's angry questions, Her answer was: "Wir wussten es nicht" "We just didn't know"

As a child I stood on tiptoes attempting to peer above graffiti stained walls that divided my city into two halves. A shield of clouds hovering above a concrete structure that stretched itself far above my searching eyes.

As a child I spent hours spinning tales in my mind, imagining that I was alive during my grandfather's time. Images of Jewish girls pinned with gold stars on frail chests flooded my thoughts. There was steel trains filled with hungry eyes that passed through cold cities and burnt bodies filled lungs with smoke- smoke that pillowed through empty streets. I imagined cold nights, closed doors, neighbors that peered through closed curtains....I held my breath.

How is it possible these monsters were humans?

"Heil Hitler"

A German soldier pinned with Swastika on right shoulder, marching.

"Heil Hitler"

My ancestors were monsters.

"Heil Hitler"

Am I a monster?

...as a child I held my breath...hoping that I would have been a good soul under Hitler's hand.

I knew better. Fear makes monsters. I had spent most of my childhood afraid.

In 6th grade I was officially a German born American. Accent and all, I started middle school in the USA. I was riding home on the school bus when a boy called out:

"Nazi!"

Tears welled up instantly.

"Ich bin kein Nazi"  
flung from my lips.

The kids laughed. It was just a joke to them. Nothing to take serious. Nazi's were people far away- from another land-monsters of another kind.

They had never wondered if a Nazi lived inside their own skin.

Attach evil to a monster and you can stand separate, non-reflective to its nature.  
Attach evil to a human, a real flesh and bones, real heart human and you are forced to stand in front of a mirror.

In memory, my grandfather sat across from me in a white stringed hammock on my back porch, full of joy, full of laughter, I ate cherries and told him stories. His presence was full of love for me.

He is my monster.

My ancestors taught me that the ability to hate lies dormant in our bodies, in the abandoned wing of our hearts. It can spread, can infiltrate our minds. Anytime we might think we have risen above hate, it might lie closer to hearts than we know.

I was taught that the origin of hate is fear.

Be weary of a country in fear.

In 1933 fear spread like wild fire across Germany. In the name of economic survival Germans hung flags from windows, cars, and storefronts. In the name of unity a red flag painted with black swastika became the symbol for national pride. Nationalism paraded blindly is the kind of pride that has broken countries into shadows of people. Many Germans had believed in the promise of greatness, of power, of permanence that Hitler had vowed to them. After the war, they were deeply disappointed in their father, who had promised them safety but brought them blood stained hands and silence. At the end of the war, German people had believed that silence was survival and following orders is what they needed to do to understand chaos. There remain to only be the traces of my ancestors left on the concrete walls they built between them and history. A deep gapping wound in the heart of the nation, demanding the instinct to not look back, to move forward, to force history into oblivion, to forget.

I was born with the craving to remember.

In my childhood neighborhood, you can still see the tiny silver fixtures that attached Hitler's flag to the fronts of every family home. They act as reminder of those who were eager to join the voice of unity with out question and in the process gave up the freedom to do otherwise. By the late 1930's Hitler's army patrolled every block, and interrogated any home that stood with out flag in fixture.

"Kenn deine Geschichte. Know your History. Ask questions," my father taught me," Never stop asking questions. You put yourself in great danger if you do."

Hitler Germany was a country that replaced knowing with believing, believing in one man that would lead them out of fear and offer them protection. Hitler, the great father.

Be weary of a country in fear.

I want to scream caution to the winds, to the tides that are made to repeat history. To myself who still lives in denial, breaths fear, and depends on something outside of myself for survival.

I am crawling in my American skin.

I am afraid of the monsters that were born on the day we remembered that we are afraid.

-- end --